The will to fight,
The theoretical roots and continuous influence of authoritarian realism

Introduction
The present paper studies the theoretical roots and later impact of an important current of realist thinking: authoritarian realism. By rejecting the search for eternal peace as a naïve and utopian task, the most authoritarian school within the realist tradition calls for the preservation of certain values that, their representatives assert, are indispensable for the preservation of a society vis-à-vis its enemies. In doing so, they call to manipulate the masses and increase the will to fight of nations.

Although realism is one of the most influential schools of thought in international relations, modern realists have not paid enough attention to the study of domestic politics. In fact, while the interaction at a domestic level between norms, identities and institutions has been central to the research agendas of liberals and constructivists alike, most neorealists tend to obviate what occurs within states and focus their attention almost entirely to the structure of the international system. There have been however some exceptions. For instance, by trying to improve balance of power theory or explaining the ‘irrational’ behaviour of some states, Posen (1984), Walt (1987), Snyder (1991) and Van Evera (1999) observe that doctrines, perceptions, interest groups, and military technologies have a role to play in the elaboration of foreign policy. A number of neorealists have also studied domestic factors to challenge the idea that an expansion of liberal democracy abroad would create the conditions for a more peaceful international system. After analysing the logic behind democratic peace theory and the historical record, most of them remark that regime type does not alter in a fundamental manner the way states conduct
their foreign policy (Mearsheimer, 1990; Layne 1994; Rosato 2003; Mansfield E. and Snyder, 2005). Again, for these authors it is the distribution of power that defines international politics.

Other branch of realism, defined by Gideon Rose (1998) as neoclassical realism, attempts to explain state outcome by looking at a number of domestic societal actors, as well as to the level of elite and societal cohesion and to the strength and structure of the state relative to its society –to see if it is possible for the state to extract enough resources to implement a sound foreign policy (Schweller 1988, 2004, 2009; Christensen 1996; Zakaria 1998). But even these authors, who pay more attention to domestic variables than neorealists, only give them a minor role; structural forces that emerge form the anarchic nature of the international system remain a far more important factor.

Thus, almost all efforts to explain foreign policy behaviour have been “top-down”, subordinating the unit to the system. In effect, either by limiting itself to explain intervening variables that are selected because they might explain why some states do not act according to what the neorealist theory of international politics would assume –and thus obviating many other possible variables- or by attempting to criticize liberal theories, the cited literature has lacked depth and range. A strong realist theory of foreign policy behaviour is still necessary.

In fact, Kenneth Waltz (1996) himself, the father of neorealism, observes that if we want to understand how states behave, theories of international politics should be complemented with theories of foreign policy. What should be the main characteristics of a realist theory of foreign policy? By looking to the work of previous realist thinkers we might better understand which are some of the principles that define the realist vision about how domestic considerations affect –or should affect- the making of foreign policy.

This is a daunting task. In this work I only attempt to study a few realist authors that share a similar view of domestic and international politics. Others have been excluded not because they are not
important but because they do not, in my opinion, belong to this branch of realism. Moreover, besides understanding realism there are other reasons why studying authoritarian realism might be helpful.

While contemporary debates regarding the formulation of foreign policy in the United States tend to have realists and neoconservatives as their most antithetical participants, an analysis about the origins and later development of these schools of thought allows us to discover some key similarities. In fact, at their roots there seems to be a common distrust against liberalism. Niccolo Machiavelli, Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss are some of the thinkers that have shaped the neoconservative and realist approach to world politics. Of course, this does not mean that most contemporary realists or neoconservatives share the illiberal views of these authors. But by ignoring the normative aspects of their world-views, modern academics and policy-makers might be –unconsciously- acting against their own liberal values.

The structure of the paper is the following. I start by analysing one central concept in the thinking of Machiavelli: virtù. Thereafter, Nietzsche’s critical evaluation of the last man, the individual liberalism and democracy have created, is presented. Following this, I introduce some of the solutions the German jurist Carl Schmitt advanced during the 20th century to palliate what he considered to be the negative effects that the diminution in the will to fight represented for the security of the West. Finally, I cite the influence these authors has in modern realism, as well as in Leo Strauss and some of his most prominent followers.

**Virtù**

Considered today as the father of modern political thought Machiavelli is well-known for having advanced the study of politics as an independent field of inquiry, one that focuses its attention on human behaviour as it is and not on the search of an ideal type of government. This vision about politics made
Machiavelli look into the history of republics and principates for those forces that have permitted states to overcome difficulties and, ultimately, achieve glory. Only by comprehending these forces, he claims, can we be successful in the present (Machiavelli, 1995: xxvi).

Machiavelli’s political thought develops from one central assumption: we live in a world in which most people behave as they can and not as they ought to. Any kind of moral consideration that obviates this reality and embraces idealistic goals is not only wrong but also dangerous. In fact, as soon as these standards are translated into actions, nations can be severely hurt. Leaders and states should then only be judged in terms of the time they have been able to preserve power, all other considerations playing only a marginal role.

And if some nations are able to grow over time it is because of their virtù. In one of his essays the French sociologist Raymond Aron (1979: xvii) points out that by virtù, Machiavelli means ‘the capacity for collective action and historic vitality.’ A virtuous society, in the view of the Italian, must then be ready to embrace the use of disciplinary violence whenever circumstances call for it. If, on the other hand, nations negate the possibility of war, more virtuous states will eventually be able to vanquish them. But such kinds of collective actions, he notes, are only possible when citizens are ready to make the kind of sacrifices that are indispensable to preserve the well being of their community. Patriotism is, therefore, a crucial asset from Machiavelli’s (1995: 126) point of view.

For him, the prototypical example of a virtuous nation is Rome. There, citizens remained loyal to the state for centuries, possessors of a set of values that made them good soldiers and good citizens. But this did not necessarily mean that they were passive on domestic affairs or that internal divisions never took place. On the contrary, without the constant strain between the poor and the noble classes, this city would never have succeeded as it did. It was the equilibrium that resulted from having each fraction
checking the power of the other that allowed Rome to preserve its virtù for such a long period—in fact, Machiavelli (1995: 14-16, 244) justifies the superiority of republics over principalities under this term.

However, to understand the meaning of virtù we must first explain how this notion differs from the more traditional use that is given to the word virtue. As we have seen, for Machiavelli the search for greatness should be pursued without taking into consideration the nature of the actions that are used to achieve this end—whether these being good or evil. He thinks, for example, that Romulus was right when he decided to kill his brother Remus because, as a result of this action, the city of Rome was created. This is a conception that challenges the sense of morality that has dominated the West for centuries. The Aristotelian tradition—to which Christian philosophy owes so much—observes that doing good is an end by itself, an objective to which all other considerations should be subordinated. The actions of any men should then be praised only if they are the product of moral virtue, not of self-interest (Mansfield HC: 1996). In words of Leo Strauss (1958: 234), ‘goodness is the habit of choosing good means for the good end’.

But what Aristotle and other Greeks forgot, Machiavelli notes, is that what characterizes human existence is the scarcity of resources. The constant search for food, partners or shelter does, as a matter of fact, creates the conditions for the members of a community to fight with one another, and for that community to fight other communities. Rulers should then be ready to promote the drive and ability their citizens have towards achieving a goal—their virtù—by, as we will later see, making good use both of certain institutions, such as religion, and of expansionist policies.

Besides virtù, there are two other concepts that are central in Machiavelli’s thought: fortune and necessity. While it is true that virtù might explain better than any other factor the success of a nation, the importance of fortune should not be overlooked. Fortune is, in effect, a force that all states should deal with regardless of how virtuous they are. A natural catastrophe—such as an earthquake—might bring an
end to the existence of a nation full of virtuous and patriotic citizens. Whenever possible, states should
then try to ally themselves to fortune because whenever this force is in the right ‘mood’ it can bring
glory to a nation; but, on the contrary, only the most skilful and forceful leaders can attempt to dominate
fortune when it does not favour the nation anymore.

Necessity, on the other hand, nourishes virtù. When a nation lives in a constant struggle with its
neighbours, its citizens develop a set of skills and values that make that city powerful and glorious. But
when nations ‘enjoy’ long periods of peace and tranquillity, their virtù might be lost and societies fall
victim to internal corruption. Then it will only be a question of time until a more powerful rival decides
to take their freedom away.

In short, virtù is the main force states have to deal with. Only by knowing how to preserve it –and
how it interacts with fortune and necessity- can nations aspire to survive and achieve glory through
time. But some questions remain to be answered: what kind of institutions should be adopted to
maintain virtù? And what happens when virtù is lost? In military expansionism and religion,
Machiavelli seems to find some answers to these questions.

In his Discourses on Livy, Machiavelli (1995: 173) observes that republics cannot isolate
themselves from the external world. Trying to enjoy freedom without being disturbed from the outside
would be naïve. Eventually other states would attack or the republic itself would succumb under the
weight of internal corruption.

So when a republic that has been ordered so as to be capable of maintaining itself does not expand,
and necessity leads it to expand, this would come to take away its foundations and make it come to
ruin sooner. So, on the other hand, if heaven were so kind that it did not have to make war, from
that would arise the idleness to make it either effeminate or divided; these two things together, or
each by itself, would be the cause of its ruin. (Machiavelli, 1995: 23)

There are a number of advantages Machiavelli finds in expansionism. Aside from the economic benefits
and the honour that conquering other lands might bring to a nation, military actions also permit good
citizens to make professional progress outside the field of politics. Indeed, one of the faults Machiavelli
(1995: 255) finds in republics is their incapacity to bring the best people to top positions in government.
And this represents a great danger for societies because these great men, feeling betrayed by this unfair
exclusion, can decide to harm the republic in search of personal success –by, for instance, promoting
internal struggle. Thus providing these citizens with the possibility of achieving glory through military
conquest makes this scenario less probable. Moreover, expansionist policies also promote the virtù of
the people by teaching them the value of sacrifice and making them powerful enough to check the noble
classes –in fact, the rich know that without popular support it would be impossible to maintain the
standing army that is necessary to protect both Rome and their possessions.

But for Machiavelli, religion plays an even more important role in preserving virtù. Because men
are not intrinsically good or bad, but malleable, compulsion can make them do what is good for society.
And while the law tends to regulate the external behaviour of the individual, only religion can change
him or her internally, creating an even more reliable source of virtù. Leaders should then learn how to
use religion to shape the behaviour of people.

By using the case of Rome, Machiavelli illustrates the importance of religion:

Everything considered, thus, I conclude that the religion introduced by Numa was among the first
causes of the happiness of that city. For it caused good orders; good orders make good fortune and
from good fortune arose the happy successes of enterprises. As the observance of the divine cult is the cause of the greatness of republics, so disdain for it is the cause of their ruin. For where the fear of God fails, it must be either that the kingdom comes to ruin or that it is sustained by the fear of a prince, which supplies the defects of religion. Because princes are of short life, it must be that the kingdom will fail soon, as his virtue fails. Hence it arises that kingdoms that depend solely on the virtue of one man are hardly durable, because that virtue fails with the life of that one; and it rarely happens that it is restored by succession. (Machiavelli, 1995: 36)

Furthermore,

Those princes or those republics that wish to maintain themselves uncorrupt have above everything else to maintain the ceremonies of their religion uncorrupt and hold them always in veneration; for one can have no greater indication of the ruin of a province that to see the divine cult disdains. (Machiavelli, 1995: 36)

However, by religion Machiavelli does not mean any kind of religion. He is thinking about a civic religion, one that is always subordinated to political power and can be manipulated by the rulers. The Roman Senate, for instance, made use of superstitions whenever they perceived a united city was necessary to confront a foreign threat. Even more, generals manipulated religious rites as a way to make soldiers feel confident about future military victories. But, still, the most important role religion played in Rome was to make citizens strong. The contrast with Christianity, in Machiavelli’s (1995: 131) view, couldn’t be greater.
Machiavelli (1995: 15) believes that with time the citizens of Rome became idle, unwilling to make the sacrifices that were necessary to preserve their city. Patriotism became discredited once the precepts of the old religion were lost, and a set of new values replaced \textit{virtù}. Indeed, the lands Rome had once conquered were now colonizing their capital by introducing their own culture.

Was the decline of Rome inevitable? Is there a way by which Rome –or, for that matter, any other state- could have avoided a scenario such as this? Machiavelli (1995: 210-212) thinks that the best solution might be found in a return to the origins of the state. He mentions the history of the Catholic Church as an example of how this process can take place. If this institution has been able to survive for so long it is because of the timely emergence of movements –such as those founded by St Francis and St Dominic- that led the Church back to the initial teachings of Jesus Christ and away from the dishonesty of the clergy. This process is, however, a difficult one. A return to the original virtues might take place by an external event, such as a war or a natural catastrophe, or by a new and strong leadership that, once it provides moral guidance or oppresses the population for a long period of time, could make citizens obey the laws and their religion once again -most of these scenarios being painful enough.

\textbf{The last man}

Machiavelli teaches us about the importance of \textit{virtù} and the necessity of applying policies that can preserve it through time. \textit{Virtù} can be understood then as an overall force of nature of which the will to fight of the people is just one possible manifestation. In principle, this is a notion that applies across time because all forms of political units –city-states, empires or modern nation-states- need their populations to be ready to fight for their survival when their security is challenged. But how well can Machiavelli’s lessons be adapted to comprehend some of the developments that have taken place in the last centuries?
In effect, most of the problems Romans and Italians faced centuries ago are very different from those societies face today. And while some of the theoretical insights Machiavelli provides might be timeless—such as the role that virtù, fortune and necessity plays in the life of states—most of the institutions he discusses no longer exist. Many of his concerns—such as achieving the unity of Italy—are not ours, while new realities—Darwinism, socialism, the expansion of liberal democracy, etc.—have since then modified the political scenario at its core. The works of Friedrich Nietzsche provide us with a useful bridge that connects Machiavelli’s thoughts with the contemporary world. In fact, Nietzsche’s criticism of liberal democracy and the creature it has produced—the last man—retakes the theme of virtù and applies it to our days.

The influence the Florentine had over Nietzsche is clear. The German never hides his admiration for Machiavelli. In some of his notes he even describes Machiavelli’s works as ‘perfection in politics’ while in a book mentions him as one of those few great individuals who lived before him (Detwiler, 1990: 4). But even more significant are the similarities we find in their works. The concept of virtù, for example, can be understood as the antecedent of the will to power. Moreover, the writers agree that the main goal for any statecraft should be to preserve power through time, while both also show a profound disregard for the morality of their time (Appel, 1999: 122).

The first thing to mention about Nietzsche is that, due to the chaotic nature of his writings—ranging from collections of aphorisms to the use of fictional characters to express his own views—and the constant contradictions we find in his works, he is a difficult author to comprehend. In fact, a great number of interpretations about his thinking have been made. Mine is just one of them.

One of Nietzsche’s ideas that make him stand out among other philosophers is his belief that the ultimate goal of a society should be the production of those few individuals who can enhance culture. There is no place then in his thinking for the common good. He seems to think that culture can progress
only if led by some kind of aristocracy, in which a group of artist-philosophers would create a class of warriors would keep the ‘mediocre’ masses at a safe distance (Detwiler, 1990: 1-16, 44-5, 63). The people –being no more than quasi-slaves- would thus have the task of providing the great ones with whatever necessity they might have. It is clear from this description that Nietzsche does not share one of fundamental principles under which modern political thought has been constructed: the idea that all individuals have an intrinsic worth and that, because of this, they possess equal rights.

Nietzsche is conscious that the world in which he lived was different from the one he dreams about. Starting with the fact that Christianity -and what he considers to be its secular descendants: socialism and democracy- has subverted everything that used to be noble by, among other things, preaching equality. Indeed, in his studies of history Nietzsche seems to have found examples of nobler societies -early Greece, Rome and the Renaissance- in which a set of different values were present. Their members embraced life and were not afraid of living dangerously, and by constantly overcoming themselves, he asserts, were also able to create higher forms of culture.

In *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche (1994) observes that two sets of values have been confronting each other throughout the centuries. On the one hand, there are the values that characterize what is noble, a dichotomy between what is good and what is bad. Those who have the joy of living under this set of principles are able to affirm life by accepting what is good and negating what is not. On the other hand, there is the good-evil dichotomy that is common among slaves. Instead of being self-assertive, slaves first define what is evil to then, by pure negation, determine what is good.

Because slaves are weaker than their rulers there is the possibility that they might attempt a rebellion through spiritual means. This is, in fact, how slaves were able to defeat the Roman Empire. With the introduction of Christianity, the Romans started to feel doubts about their own behaviour, acquiring a sense of guilt that they never experienced before. Vices, such as humility and pity, became
virtues (Machiavelli, 1994: 18,19). The consequences of this process, Nietzsche asserts, are present even today.

In fact, with the pass of time man became increasingly weaker, a passive creature that values love and charity while rejecting the search for power, glory and war as vices. Furthermore, due to their constant efforts to lock their desires within themselves, individuals developed a ‘bad conscience’ that has introduced a culture of self-punishment (Nietzsche, 1994: 16). To sum up, our world -that of Christianity, socialism and democracy- is a world dominated by a slave mentality.

... Today we see nothing that wants to expand, we suspect that things will just continue to decline, getting thinner, better-natured, cleverer, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian - no doubt about it, man is getting 'better' all the time... Right here is where the destiny of Europe lies -in losing our fear of man we have also lost our love for him, our respect for him, our hope in him and even our will to be man. The sight of man now makes us tired -what is nihilism today if it is not that? ... We are tired man... (Nietzsche, 1994: 27)

But Nietzsche notes that the time of Christianity –and that of certainties in general- is also reaching an end. And while this process might create the opportunity of reshaping the values of men, it also introduces great dangers.

As a matter of fact, Nietzsche’s thinks individuals need a horizon to survive, a system of beliefs that can order their actions and help them differentiate what is good from what is not. But once the modern man realized that ‘God is dead’, the horizon that dominated Europe for centuries suddenly disappeared. And while some positivists might welcome this event and believe that science could supplant the role religion used to play in the past, Nietzsche warns us that the end of all theological
faiths also brings an end of all metaphysical faiths—including that of science. The only role science can play is that of reducing uncertainties by explaining some mechanical laws, but science is ultimately unable to produce a new set of values. Then, the danger we confront today is that of nihilism.

Nietzsche (2003a: 84) agrees that all truths are relative—what an individual thinks as truthful depends on the perspective from which he or she is observing ‘reality.’ Systems of values are then no more than the product of historical events that permitted some individuals—either the herd or the ‘beasts of prey’—to create a new set of values and then to impose it to others. With time, these values became universally accepted within a particular community.

But is there any way by which the dangers nihilism represents can be avoided? Is there still a possible horizon for man? Nietzsche thinks that there is one, ‘a new transmutation of values’ that might permit a ‘non metaphysical transcendence’ (Femia, 2001: 118).

After observing nature, Nietzsche (1990: 87, 103) concludes that what characterizes life is not the survival of the fittest—as Darwinists might think,—nor the search for truth or God that characterized human endeavours for centuries, but the ‘will to power.’ In effect, life should be understood as a constant fight for overcoming—one self and others—through the acquisition of power. And the conflicts that such a process produces should not be rejected—as Kant and other philosophers have done in the past—but welcomed, because without conflict there would be no necessity and without necessity the overcoming of man would be impossible.

From this continuous process of self-overcoming, a super man might eventually emerge; a philosopher-artist who does not need gods or metaphysical truths to survive; someone who is ready to affirm life in all its forms. The super man is the new horizon.

On the contrary, the last man of our days is the product of democracy, someone who looks for comfort and security above everything else. He or she is happy with the mediocre life he has, knowing
now that all truths are relative and that nobody has the right to question his life style. The last man also loves peace, but only because he or she does not believe in anything strongly enough to fight for it. As Francis Fukuyama notes, following a Straussian reading,

For Nietzsche democratic man was composed entirely of desire and reason, clever at finding new ways to satisfy a host of petty wants through the calculation of long-term self-interest. But he was completely lacking in any megalothymia, content with his happiness and unable to feel any sense of shame in himself for being unable to rise above those want. (Fukuyama 1993: 301)

Megalothymia, in effect, plays a major role in our discussion. The origin of this concept comes from Greece. In ancient times philosophers recognized that man is composed by reason, desire and the aspiration to be recognized –or thymos. And this thymos can take two different forms: megalothymia –the search for being recognized as a superior by others- and isothymia –the search for being recognized as an equal by others. While isothymia is prevalent in the contemporary world –as is evident by the success numerous social movements have reached in their search for equality of rights- the value of megalothymia has been mostly forgotten. And although megalothymia can be the source of violent conflict among individuals who are ready to risk their own life in their search for this kind of recognition, megalothymia is also the source of some of humanity’s greatest achievements (Fukuyama, 1993: 182). Gifted actors, painters and musicians are in part driven towards creation by a strong desire to be recognized as superior either by the masses or by a small circle of critics.

Nietzsche believes that liberal democracy has given far too much value to the pursue of peace and equality and, as a result of this, societies have become weaker. In effect, what early liberal thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes (1990), have achieved is to eliminate megalothymia from our lives, creating, in
this way, the bourgeois society of today (Fukuyama, 1993: 184-185). The proud aristocrats of the past now have to accept a new model of society in which their desires for recognition are neutralized. Sports and the accumulation of wealth seem to have become the only ways by which individuals can ‘exercise’ their megalothymia. As a logical outcome of this process, Nietzsche would assert, democracies have entered into a lethargic state.

Retaking once more the concept of virtù, Nietzsche observes that struggle -and the state of danger that comes from it- not only produces great individuals, but also enhances nations:

The nations which were worth something, which became worth something, never became so under liberal institutions: it was great danger which made them something deserving reverence, danger which first teaches us to know our resources, our virtues, our shield and spear, our spirit - which compels us to be strong... First principle: one must need strength, otherwise one will never have it. Those great forcing-houses for strong human beings, for the strongest kind there has ever been, the aristocratic communities of the pattern of Rome and Venice, understood freedom in precisely the sense which I understand the word 'freedom': as something one has and does not have, something one wants, something one conquers... (Nietzsche, 1990: 104)

Furthermore,

Democracy has always been the declining form of the power to organize: I have already, in Human, All too Human, characterized modern democracy, together with its imperfect manifestations such as the "German Reich", as the decaying form of the state. For institutions to exists there must exist the kind of will, instinct, imperative which is anti-liberal to the point of malice: the will to tradition, to authority, to centuries-long responsibility, to solidarity between succeeding generations backwards
and forwards in infinitum. If this will is present, there is established something such as the Imperium Romanum: or such as Russia, the antithesis of that pitiable European petty-state... (Nietzsche, 1990: 105)

Then, for Nietzsche the respect for traditions can be a source of national power. Not only does Nietzsche show respect for tradition, but he also defends a number of other positions that define modern Conservative thought –including the defence of the nuclear family and the role religion play in modern societies. What remains central to a conservative reading of Nietzsche is, however, the idea that hierarchy remains an effective antidote against the last man. From hierarchy comes order, and from order an environment that facilitates the production of higher forms of culture.

Nietzsche (1968: 144) thinks that religion can play an important role in the preservation of a hierarchical order in society. He notes that ‘moralities and religions are the principal means by which one can make whatever one wishes out of man, provided one possesses a superfluity of creative forces and can assert one's will over long periods of time -in the form of legislation, religion and customs.’ Following the path settled by Machiavelli, the German seems to suggest that Christianity can assist the few to keep the herd under control. As a ‘herd religion Christianity teaches obedience… Christians are easier to rule than no Christians’ (Nietzsche, 1968: 216). However, it is important to note that in his opinion the select few should never adopt the precepts of this religion, which Nietzsche finds dangerous and false.

Although Nietzsche was not a nationalist himself, he also recognizes the importance of nations. Defined as communities of values that share the same conception about what is good and bad, nations might play –by defining the mentality of the people- a key role in explaining domestic and international politics. In fact, in his writings we found numerous comments regarding national character. We learn
that Nietzsche admires the aesthetic qualities of the French and the will of power of the Russians, while he despises the shallowness of the Germans and the poor use the British do of their minds. What Nietzsche does reject is the intellectual movement that, under the name of nationalism, justifies anti-Semitism and foments petit politics among states.

To sum up, in Nietzsche’s view, nations need a hierarchical order, and for that to happen people should respect traditions, law and religion. These are all factors that contribute to a nation’s power. Nietzsche shows serious doubts about the future of Europe in this respect. As a matter of fact, he perceives in Russia a far more vigorous and powerful nation. He thinks that if changes do not take place within the Old Continent, Imperial Russia would eventually become a major threat to Europe’s security. But maybe, he observes, this is the type of danger Europe needs to revert its values. Necessity, as Machiavelli have noted, nourishes virtù (Nietzsche, 2003b: vi, 208).

In search of solutions

The emergence of the Soviet Union as a major geopolitical and ideological threat to the West has been reflected in the works of numerous political thinkers, some of them noting what they considered to be the lack of will to fight some populations showed at the time. Indeed, authors such as Raymond Aron, Jean-Francois Revel and Samuel Huntington have described this phenomenon extensively (Revel, 1983). But it is in the writings of Carl Schmitt that we found a systematic attempt to find a solution to the problems this new development caused, in his view, to Western security.

The state of crisis in which the Weimar Republic was immersed during the 1920’s and 1930’s made Schmitt advance a series of challenges to liberalism. First of all, Schmitt blames liberalism for permitting the existence of political romanticism. In effect, only liberal societies –with their sharp distinction between the public and the private spheres- could allow for politics to become something of
a spectacle, an area in which the aesthetic tastes of the individual can be experienced –just like in the theatre or in the opera. With Romanticism, politics has become a continuous discussion in which no decision is ever reached. Determining what is right from what is wrong is simply out of the question because by settling a dispute the discussion would reach an end, and the satisfaction that comes from exchanging phrases would then be lost too. To sum up, what political romanticism has allowed –by never reaching a decision- is for the status quo to continue (Schmitt, 1986: xxxi). And Schmitt thinks that, due to the profound crisis Germany was going through due to the constant threat it faced both from within and abroad, a scenario such as this was simply unacceptable.

Furthermore, Schmitt blames liberalism for having created a system of government -Parliament Democracy- that does not work anymore. In his view, one of the main presumptions the founding fathers of Parliamentarism had in their minds for its well functioning was the existence of an open debate of ideas. This would, the argument goes, allow for the selection of the best possible solution to the problems a society faces. But the expansion of democracy in the last centuries has made it impossible for solutions to be reached in this manner. In fact, today, the responsibility of making decisions is not in Parliament anymore but in a number of committees and subcommittees that are heavily influenced by the action of interest groups. (Schmitt, 1985a: 49-50). In addition, when its time to vote, majorities are created through the use of propaganda, by manipulating the feelings and short-term interest of the public (Schmitt, 1985a: 6-7). As a result, the will of the people is not advanced.

As a matter of fact, for Schmitt democracy and liberalism are not the same thing. The association we tend to make between these two concepts is the result of a set of circumstances that were very different than ours. In effect, the strategic alliance between democracy and liberalism came to be as a result of the common enemy they faced during the 19th century: the monarchy. But now, having succeeded in their task by defeating it, the contradictions between these two principles have become
more evident than ever before. There is, he asserts, no reason why democratic governments should be identified with liberalism and its institutions anymore. History is full of examples of authoritarian governments that have represented the will of the people as good, or even better, than the best parliamentary democracies. Thus, the people can be represented as well by a single individual as by a committee of representatives (Schmitt, 1985a: 17, 34).

But it is in The Concept of the Political where Schmitt presents his most sophisticated attack against liberal democracy. What liberalism has done, he asserts, is to suppress the political from our lives and, by doing so, reducing all possible disputes either to the fields of economics or ethics. In this way, political adversaries are now considered simply as competitors or intellectual rivals. There is, nevertheless, a political aspect that is always present, regardless of whether we like it or not.

As aesthetics is defined by the distinction between beautiful and ugly, ethics between good and bad, and economics between what is profitable and what it is not, friend and enemy define, Schmitt’s (1996: 25-27) points out, the political. The enemy is the other, the one who is existentially different, someone with whom a deathly conflict is possible. And because on differentiating friends from enemies depends the same existence of human groups, the political precedes all other human endeavours in importance.

The first responsibility of the state is then, in Schmitt’s (1996: 46) opinion, to identify its friends and its enemies. Only by doing this, can citizens live in peace and pursue their private affairs with tranquillity. States should thus be aware that –both in the external and the internal fronts- potential enemies exist and that a war with them is a possibility. Those who have ignored this reality have suffered a great deal. This was, for instance, the case of the Russian upper classes, who made the mistake of idealizing the qualities of the peasantry at the time the latter were planning an uprising that would put an end to the existence of the former. Furthermore, the French aristocracy engaged in a similar behaviour before the revolution of 1789 (Schmitt, 1996: 69).
In the external front, the greatest risk a nation faces is to lose its will to fight. Schmitt (1996: 53) observes that ‘If a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear.’ What liberalism does then is to harm the ability of the state to carry its main task: distinguish who the enemy is and to act in consequence. But how could the unwillingness to fight Schmitt notes among the Europeans of his time be reverted? He makes two main proposals: first he calls for a stronger government and then for the introduction of a myth that can help rally the masses against their enemies.

The challenges Germany faced during Schmitt’s lifetime made him think that a stronger government was necessary. With political movements both from the extreme Right and the extreme Left challenging the existence of the republic from within and a powerful Soviet Union threatening it from the East, Schmitt proposed a stronger executive, one that could establish order and, if necessary, banish the opposition. Thus he introduced a novel interpretation of article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, one that permitted the President to call a state of emergency (Schmitt, 1985b: 11-13). Only by making the state of emergency permanent and without restrictions, he thought, the state would be able to identify and fight its enemies.

Schmitt was particularly worried about the Soviet Union (Balakrishnan, 2000: 125-126). He thought that the introduction of this new dictatorship had allowed the Communist government to recognize the existence of the political. But this fact did, alone, not explain the success of Moscow. Following the works of anarchist George Sorel (1999), Schmitt (1985a) observes that myths are what make people act. And the profound hate against the bourgeois that characterizes the communist rhetoric permitted the Russians to consider the possibility of sacrificing themselves for a cause. This new attitude is, he asserts, what makes this particular country and socialism in general so powerful.
But besides strengthening the government, what else could Western societies do to confront the socialist myth? The German jurist thinks that, because of the state moral relativism and disbelief that existed at the time among Europeans, this was a particular difficult task to achieve (1985a: 73). However, he thought Mussolini had found a solution.

The answer to the socialist threat was the introduction of an alternative and more powerful myth: the dream of an idyllic nation that should be defended by all its sons and daughters. Indeed, the myth of the nation had already defeated the socialist myth on Italian soil. In short, a stronger government and a new myth could, if not eliminate liberalism completely, at least empower Western countries vis-à-vis their enemies by raising the will to fight of their people.

**Leo Strauss**

The last author to be discussed is Leo Strauss, a political philosopher whose ideas shares many similarities with those of the thinkers we have studied so far. Among them is his rejection of liberalism, the recognition of the hard realities of international politics and a preference for a hierarchical society. 1 As a matter of fact, he developed all these ideas after having studied these authors with great care.

The importance of Strauss comes mainly from the fact that he transmitted the authoritarian ideas we have discussed so far to a generation of American students who would later become powerful members of the security and foreign affairs establishments of the United States.

One of Strauss’ main projects was to interpret the dialogues of Plato from a different perspective than the one that had became prevalent in the Anglo-American scholarship tradition. In one of his works about the subject -in which he qualifies Plato as an enemy of liberal democracy- Strauss embraces some of Plato’s illiberal beliefs (Strauss, 1987: 44-45). In *The City and Man*, for instance, he seems to agree with Plato by mentioning the important role that ‘noble lies’ play in the preservation of a stable order.
He even goes one step forward. While for the Greek philosopher noble lies must ultimately reflect the truth, for the German this should not necessarily be the case. Thus, myths that do not reflect reality could also be useful in advancing the unity of the state vis-à-vis their enemies.

And this may to be one of the lessons Strauss learnt from Carl Schmitt -with whom, after all, he received advice when living in Germany. 2 These two authors remark the necessity of creating a national myth that, while not necessarily reflecting what is true, could increase the will to fight of the people, uniting individuals under one single ‘flag.’

Moreover, in his critique of The Concept of the Political, as well as in his letters with Alexandre Kojève, Strauss shares Schmitt’s concerns about the trivialization of modern man -the last man Nietzsche wrote about (Strauss, 1991). In his view liberalism, the perfect partner of nihilism, created a state of affairs by which the constant search for a Kantian or Marxist utopia that would have eliminated conflict from our lives had instead brought an end to something more fundamental: our humanity.

Related to his views regarding the existence of a natural order in society is what Shadia Drury (1988,1997) describes as the elitism of Leo Strauss. This comes, as Drury and Laurence Lampert (1996) rightly observe, from Strauss reading of Nietzsche. While the names might change, the hierarchical understanding of society remains basically the same. On the one hand, Strauss mentions the characteristics and functions the wiser man, the gentlemen and the vulgar should play in a stable regime while, on the other, Nietzsche affirms that healthy states must be ruled by a small elite of philosopher-artists who, with the support of warriors, should be able to preserve their superiority over the slaves. But in both cases rulers embrace the truth and are not deceived by the myths and lies they have created to remain in power. They are, indeed, the only ones who can see the hard realities of life without trembling. For them, there are not gods, only the search for truth –in the case of Strauss - and culture – from Nietzsche’s perspective (Strauss, 1983a: 178-190).
On the other extreme we found the vulgar, the people. Those who are mostly concerned about being entertained and enjoying short-term pleasures, ultimately unwilling to make sacrifices for any cause. And with the arrival of liberalism, they were able to won the battle against the aristocrats and impose the notion of equality. A final category is formed by the warriors -or Strauss’ gentlemen-, those individuals who can support the few great ones. Their sense of virtue makes them particularly susceptible to the noble lies wise man promotes among the vulgar.

To achieve the supremacy of the wise over the vulgar –and thus preserving the search for the truth that should guide philosophy- while at the same time nourishing the will to fight that is indispensable for any state to remain secure in a dangerous world, Strauss takes advice from Machiavelli and Nietzsche and looks for support on religion. In effect, although not identifying as religious individuals themselves, all these thinkers believe religious institutions can play an important role in society. It is religion what maintains populations uncorrupted by preserving their virtù -in the case of Machiavelli- or by stopping –in Strauss’s view- the advance of liberalism, nihilism and equality. The key concepts here being the deception and the manipulation of the people by making use of propaganda and noble lies -it should be noted, however, that while Machiavelli calls for a new civic religion, Strauss seem to rely in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Another lesson Strauss (1983b) takes from Machiavelli is his understanding of societies as close communities that should maintain their values and look with scepticism foreign ones. Thus, if the will to fight of Rome diminished once its citizens acquired foreign values that subverted its virtù, with the arrival of nihilism something similar took place in the West, a crisis of confidence that emerged from believing that no set of values, including ours, is superior to others (Strauss, 1964:3).

It is important to answer here one possible challenge to the interpretation that authors such as Drury have made of Strauss’ work. Steven Smith, for instance, presents an entirely different opinion regarding
what were Strauss’ views about liberalism and democracy, one that is based on some of the works the
philosopher wrote once he arrived to the United States. Most notably among them is Strauss self-
definition as ‘a friend of democracy’ -that, after all, only means that he was not a democrat. I believe
that these statements should be treated with great care (Smith, 2006).

We must remember that in *Persecution of the Art of Writing* Strauss (1952) outlines a number of
reasons that explain why philosophers should conceal the real meaning of their thinking from the
vulgar. Wise individuals, and he considered himself one of them, should hide their real opinions from
society to avoid the people from getting familiar with truths that they might not be able to handle –such
as the notion that God is death. This could, indeed, harm the state by promoting nihilism. In second
term, philosophers must remain secretive to protect themselves from the kind of public persecution that
caused the death of Socrates.

Strauss thus develops a method to study political philosophy that states that whenever we read the
works of great minds we should look both for their exoteric and esoteric meaning, the one that is
suppose to reach the vulgar and the one that is directed only to the wise. There is a number of ways by
which great thinkers can hide their esoteric teaching. It is thus the job of the modern scholar to uncover
them. We can conclude, therefore, that whatever Leo Strauss wrote after developing his ideas about
esoteric writing might have followed the same logic, and must then be distrusted –especially if we
consider that, due to the always-present possibility of social ostracism, Strauss did not consider the
United States a particularly friendly place to express unpopular views. His early writings and what his
students have done once in government might, on the contrary, be a more reliable proof of his real
thoughts.

The will to fight
In this article we have discussed a set of ideas that were developed by authors who form part—with the possible exception of Leo Strauss, who might not be a realist at all—of a distinctive intellectual tradition: authoritarian realism.

Authoritarian realists describe the world as they see it and call for the implementation of policies that respect the set of rules reality imposes. Of course, the forces that shape the world vary from one author to another. Thus, while Machiavelli finds in virtù, necessity and fortune the main forces that determine the destiny of nations, Nietzsche thinks that the will to power reflects the true nature of politics. Schmitt, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of the friend-enemy dichotomy. Another factor common to these thinkers is their profound dislike for those idealistic views that once applied into politics might cause the ruin of states.

It might be argued, however, that the principles described above are common to most realists. What makes authoritarian realism a distinctive school of thought within this broader tradition is the belief that states need strong governments that can manipulate citizens, hide from them information and promote values that—although not necessarily true—may improve the security of the state. Moreover, most authoritarian realists feel a particular contempt for liberalism.

The differences between these thinkers should, however, not be denied. And it is in their enemies that we found the main differences between them. While the first authoritarian realists blamed Christianity for having weakened nations, Schmitt blames liberalism for this development. Nietzsche helps us understand how this transition took place.

In Nietzsche’s opinion, Christianity subverted the noble values of the past by converting vices into virtues and by introducing the notion of equality. Liberalism however went one step forward by promoting equal rights for everyone. Furthermore, its individualistic nature makes liberalism the perfect ally of nihilism, which together have created in ours a society that, he asserts, is composed by
individuals who are afraid of living and are unable to overcome themselves. Indeed, if the man of today loves peace, it is only because he does not believe in anything strong enough to fight for. Pacifism is just another symptom of this terrible disease.

But probably the most important idea advanced by authoritarian realism is the role the will to fight of the people plays in the life of nations. This usually neglected concept can be considered one of the many forms Machiavelli’s *virtù* can adopt. Thus, when a society is able to preserve its will to fight it can expect to remain uncorrupted and safe, but when a population loses its capacity to make the sacrifices that are necessary to conduct war, the power of the state diminishes dramatically. No matter the armament a country might have or how well developed its economy is: if the people are not willing to defend their state, the nation will eventually become an easy prey for its enemies.

Throughout the 20th century, authoritarian realists have shown a special concern both about the decreasing levels of bellicosity they observed among Western societies and the influence liberal democracy played in this process. The alliance between liberalism and nihilism restricted, the argument goes, the work illiberal groups -such as churches, families, and the armed forces- used to play in the past. Being today the individual king and moral relativism an undisputable principle, it has become increasingly difficult for them to teach individuals the value of personal sacrifice –without which dying for one’s own country is impossible- and to provide them with a moral horizon. In effect, these are all illiberal institutions because, among other things, they reject relativism, value the group more than the individual and maintain a strong hierarchical structure. To sum up, for authoritarian realists these groups are the best antidotes societies have to confront the last man.

Furthermore, when ‘educating’ the people, families, religious institutions and the military might not necessarily express what is true. On the contrary, their function is to promote noble lies, such as religion and national myths, that strengthens the power of the state and make individuals accept their place in
society –where they could be ruled by an enlighten minority. The use of propaganda is therefore a key aspect of authoritarian realism.

The critique of liberalism is thus clear. Authoritarian realism does not challenge the fact that democracies might be more peaceful than authoritarian regimes. It advances a more fundamental kind of criticism: pacifism is not necessarily something good. On the contrary, by promoting the search for an eternal peace among nations liberalism weakens the state by making people less willing to fight. In fact, by corrupting national virtù liberalism, nihilism and moral relativism promote policies that can only bring ruin to a nation. Conflict is in the view of authoritarian realists an inescapable reality of social life that should be accepted, not negated. The values and institutions that are indispensable to defend societies from internal and externals threats should therefore be promoted, not discouraged. From this, authoritarian realists conclude that if liberal democracy cannot be eliminated –due to its present strength- it should at least be manipulated in a way that creates those conditions that are necessary for populations to embrace values that are compatible with war and –for some of them- expansionism.

But in what ways has authoritarian realism influenced modern realism? To answer this question we must first mention that Hans Morgenthau, considered by many as one of the founders of modern realism, was a great admirer of Machiavelli and Nietzsche. In fact, he also shared both Schmitt’s views regarding the necessity of preserving the autonomy of the political and some of his criticisms against liberalism. (Frei, 2001: 121-122, 157-158, 196). Thus, there is at least one significant connection between the European realists of previous decades and their American counterparts. Moreover, George Kennan –the father of containment and one of America’s best-known realists- holds similar opinions. He, for instance, considers that liberal democracies tend to be paralyzed with concerns about law and justice, making the conduct of a realistic and sound foreign policy a difficult task. Kennan (2012: 70)
even asked himself whether a democracy ‘is not uncomfortably similar to one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin.’

Although most neorealists share with authoritarian realists their dislike for utopian visions about the future and accept that violent conflicts among states are always possible, it is still an open question whether the doubts neorealists raise against the possible expansion of liberal democracy –as a way to achieve a more peaceful world- is in some way related to the criticisms authoritarian realists advance against this type of regime. What makes it difficult to answer this and similar questions is the fact that the scientific approach adopted by neorealists tends to obviate discussions about the best possible form of political organization. Normative approaches are thus discouraged. Furthermore, even if some neorealists might have doubts about liberal democracy’s capacity to implement a sound foreign policy, living in a democracy (as almost all of them do) makes it difficult to express this point of view. The possibility of social ostracism is always present (Strauss, 1952).

In Morgenthau’s (1973: 149-154) work, as in that of numerous neoclassical realists, we also observe a preoccupation with the will to fight of populations (Christensen, 1996; Schweller, 2004, 2009). Then, national morale becomes for them a source of power without which it would be difficult to answer security threats. The resemblance with authoritarian realism in this case is clear.

Although not always explicit in the most recent realist literature, there also seems to exist the idea that governments should, above all, be strong. In effect, while liberals, constructivists and other scholars give great importance to civil society, realists tend to focus their attention on governmental authority. Either by rejecting the role some interest groups play in the foreign policy process, or by calling for administrations that can conduct foreign affairs in an autonomous, rational and professional way –while at the same time canalizing people`s passions to support the implementation of a rational policy- they seem to think that governments are –or at least should be- the main actors not only in the international
but also in the domestic sphere (Zakaria, 1998: 9; Schweller 2009; Taliaferro 2009). On the contrary, civil society is either obviated or treated with distrust.

The importance modern realists give to a government’s ability to take and then enforce policy decisions might also explain why these authors do not care much about regime type. Indeed, they seem to be more interested about whether a government is strong and capable than if it is a democracy or not (Huntington, 1968: 1). This might in fact be one of the most important legacies that comes from authoritarian realism –and particularly from the work of Carl Schmitt – and should, in my view, become a building block of any future realist theory of foreign policy behaviour.

Although, as we have seen, authoritarian realism has helped to shape modern realism, probably those who have been more influenced by authoritarian realists are the neoconservatives. As a matter of fact, it was in part as a result of their readings of Leo Strauss and some of the other thinkers studied here that the first generation of neoconservatives, mainly Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz, devoted themselves to combating pacific strains in American society – with considerable success, as the Bush administration’s record shows. 4

The neoconservatives seem to have taken from the authors studied above the idea that illiberal institutions, such as churches and the armed forces, can neutralize the ‘vices’ liberalism and democracy promote among American citizens. They, for instance, celebrate religion without being religious themselves. Some of them even question the idea that citizens should receive correct information at all. Kristol, for instance, argues that,

There are different kinds of truths for different kinds of people. There are truths appropriate for children; truths that are appropriate for students; truths that are appropriate for educated adults; and truths that are
appropriate for highly educated adults, and the notion that there should be one set of truths available to everyone is a modern democratic fallacy. It doesn't work. (Bailey, 1997)

In fact, whether in government or academia most neoconservatives have followed a conservative reading of Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Schmitt. Straussian scholars such as Allan Bloom and Harvey Mansfield interpreted the great works of political philosophy from this perspective to later transmitted it to a new generation of politicians and public intellectuals –of whom Kristol, Fukuyama and Paul Wolfowitz might be the best known.

In the writings of Bloom (1987), Mansfield (1993) and other Straussian thinkers we find Machiavelli’s vision of a religious society in which military expansionism can be used as a way to nourish virtù at home, as well as Carl Schmitt’s concerns about establishing a strong executive capable of confronting the nation’s enemies. Conflict is thus for them something that is not necessarily bad, but a phenomenon that can help preserve the security and the moral strength of society. Moreover, behind the thoughts of the neoconservatives we also note an elitist vision of how society should be organized, one in which only a selected few are capable of accepting the tragic nature of politics. Then, and contrary to what many of them state, neoconservatism has historically distrusted the masses and liberalism. The possible use of ‘noble lies’ such as the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraqi or Saddam Hussein’s relations with al-Qaeda could, from this perspective, be interpreted as instruments to raise support, among the masses, for the best possible political strategy.

We can then conclude that the neoconservatives’ recent support for liberal democracy, as exemplified by the set of arguments they presented to justify the occupation of Iraq, had more to do with political tactics than with a genuine desire to expand liberal democracy. On the contrary, they are closely associated with a tradition that sees in liberalism the root of some of the major problems
societies face today. In this study, therefore, we have seen that there are a number of dangerous precepts that form part both of the realist and neoconservative traditions. Their representatives should be conscious about their existence.

Notes
1- Strauss (1953: 106) held some realists views regarding foreign policy.
2- A useful description of the intellectual relation between these two thinkers can be found in the work of Meier (1995).
3- Drury (2007) critics this way of reading Strauss.
4- Kristol (1997: 6-9) argues that Strauss was one of his most important intellectual influences.
5- It should be noted that not all Straussians are neoconservatives. Nevertheless, most neoconservatives do share the principles advanced by Leo Strauss –the defence of Israel being one of them. (Heilbrunn, 2009: 94-95).
6- Thus the support Jeane Kirkpatrick, the leading neoconservative in government during the 1980’s, provided to right-wing Latin American dictatorships is a clear sign that the current concern neoconservatives show for expanding democracy is mostly a tactic (Kirkpatrick, 1982). Neither Strauss (1964: 138-242), citing the example of Athens, supported the expansion of democracy by force.

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